

CT COMMUNITY NONPROFIT ALLIANCE



To: Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee

**From: Jeffrey Shaw, Director of Public Policy
CT Community Nonprofit Alliance**

**Re: Government Administration and Elections Public Hearing in support of S.B. 104 AN ACT
ESTABLISHING THE STATE CIVIC NETWORK and H.B. 5050, AN ACT CONCERNING
MODERNIZING PARKING SIGNS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.**

Date: February 22, 2016

Good afternoon Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

My name is Jeffrey Shaw and I am the Director of Public Policy at CT Community Nonprofit Alliance. The CT Nonprofit Alliance represents more than 550 community nonprofit organizations and associations across the state and is the largest advocacy organization representing community nonprofits in Connecticut. **Together, our members serve more than 500,000 Connecticut residents each year.**

S.B. 104, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE STATE CIVIC NETWORK.

I am here today to voice support about the establishment of the Connecticut (State) Civic Network, the state-wide, cable channel and internet presence providing live and archived coverage of Connecticut state government and civic affairs. One of the overarching principles of the nonprofit sector is to **promote civic engagement as an essential activity nonprofits should embrace** by encouraging and educating staff, clients, Board members and other supporters within their capacity. Examples of civic engagement include, but are not limited to, testifying at public hearings, voting, engaging in community conversations for advancement of common interests, and many others. However, understanding the legislative process, accessing public hearing information, (even) finding a local legislator, is often difficult for individuals and families, which is why making government more accessible and understandable is so important.

As safe havens for people to gather to amplify their collective voices, **nonprofits have a duty to stand up and speak out for the public good and promote a more just and equitable society.** Nonprofits often provide a voice for those individuals and groups who are unable to speak for themselves. Likewise, **nonprofits share the responsibility to promote greater engagement of the citizenry, open elections, and open government.**

An enhanced Connecticut Civic Network will **empower nonprofits from across the state through full access to state government proceedings.** It will especially give those unable to travel (the elderly, families without dependable transportation, individuals with disabilities, and others) the ability to follow these activities and engage in these community and statewide conversations, whether online or in-person at a later date. Expanding access would also combat the reality that on most days during the

legislative session, only 20% of meetings or hearings in the LOB are televised, and therefore largely inaccessible to people who are unable to attend in person.

In addition to live coverage of legislative sessions and important policy discussion events already on the Connecticut Television Network (CTN), the State Civic Network would bring coverage of more (potentially all) legislative hearings & meetings, all Supreme/Appellate Court arguments, and key Executive Branch meetings & hearings to millions of residents. Expanded coverage will benefit individuals as well as organizations with limited capacity to attend meetings and hearings in-person. Finally, searchable archives will save time and provide an efficient way to share important information to a wider audience.

Meaningful and effective citizen participation in our democracy depends on full, reliable access to the deliberations and decisions of state government. In that spirit, CT Community Nonprofit Alliance works to create a culture that promotes civic engagement as a core component of the mission of nonprofits. The Connecticut Civic Network will provide additional resources to fulfill this objective.

H.B. 5050, AN ACT CONCERNING MODERNIZING PARKING SIGNS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

I am also here today to testify in support of the proposal to modernize parking signs for people with disabilities. This legislation would change the icon on the well-known accessibility signs from a stick-figure in a wheelchair to a figure leaning forward, showing movement. The **new icon suggests the independence and engagement** of those with accessibility needs and **seeks to change attitudes of the general public towards people with accessibility needs**. In addition, the word “handicapped” should be replaced by “reserved” for parking signs because “handicapped” is offensive to many people. It indicates helplessness and those with accessibility needs are anything but helpless. Finally, these signs would only be used for new construction or to replace older, worn-out signs, and would not incur additional cost to taxpayers. This proposal would go a long way towards **supporting the diverse community of people who use accessible parking**, most of whom do not use wheelchairs but nevertheless have accessibility needs.

Thank you.

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